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SUBJECT: STAFFDEL SIMON

REF: GUATEMALA 02180

1. (U) Summary: Jennifer Simon, Professional Staff to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, visited Guatemala from August 21-25. During her visit, Simon met with a broad range of GOG and NGO contacts, including Vice President Eduardo Stein, MFA Vice-Minister Marta Altolaguirre, Human Rights Commissioner Frank LaRue, Minister of Government Carlos Vielman, Minister of Defense Casar Pinela, human rights activist Helen Mack, Roving Ambassador Rigoberta Menchu, etc. Simon's primary interests focused on AID projects and funding levels, human rights, CICIACS, military downsizing, TIP, and counter-narcotics. Overall, the visit was very positive. Simon's five-word summary of her conclusions from her visit was that Guatemala is "on the right track." End Summary.

#### AID programs

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2. (U) Simon visited a wide-variety of AID projects: a Victim's Shelter located in a former military base, a Justice Center, non-traditional exporters Agexpront, and a women's Village Bank. She said she was struck by the relatively low ratio of funding on a per capita basis for Guatemala compared with other AID missions in Central America.

#### Human Rights

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3. (U) In various meetings, Simon heard that the levels of threats against human rights defenders peaked in 2002 but remain high. Human rights leaders (Menchu, Mack, Blanco, Samayoa) expressed confidence in the intentions of Berger and Stein. However, they also expressed concern about deep divides in both the Cabinet and Congress on issues such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, CICIACS, and ex-Pac payments. Simon's visit came immediately after Congress passed a bill approving payments to former ex-Pacs, and she discussed both the moral issue and the fiscal impact of the payments with HR leaders and VP Stein.

#### CICIACS

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4. (U) In her orientation briefing with Country Team, the Ambassador described his recent meeting with Fuentes-Destarc regarding CICIACS (refel) and summarized the GOG's developing plan to reshape CICIACS to work within the Public Ministry. Though HR leaders expressed disappointment that the GOG had not consulted with civil society or the Human Rights Ombudsman since the August 6 Court decision, Simon left expressing belief that hope remains for implementing a CICIACS-like institution. She told HR leaders that she hoped they would not give up on CICIACS.

#### Military Downsizing

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5. (U) Simon discussed the military downsizing with VP Stein, Milgp and DATT, and human rights activists. All praised the Berger government for quickly accomplishing a significant draw-down with little resistance from the military. Simon also attended a breakfast hosted by the Milgp commander, organized for Human Rights Commissioner Frank LaRue (COPREDEH) and Defense Minister Pinedo to discuss Southcom's coordination with the Guatemalan MOD on developing a human rights initiative. Ever since LaRue's translation for Pinedo's presentation in Washington, DC, the warm relationship between COPREDEH and the MOD has been striking.

#### Trafficking in Persons

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6. (U) Simon met with Vice-Minister Altolaguirre, who spoke of GOG efforts in the inter-institutional group to coordinate on TIP. Altolaguirre discussed the scope of the problem, the need for dissemination of information to the public (the Secretariat for Social Welfare is currently spearheading a

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information campaign), and the MFA's work on a package of trafficking legislation (some legislation on increasing penalties is already being reviewed in Congress).

#### Counter-narcotics

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17. (U) Simon met with MOG Vielman and Vice-Minister Sylvia Vasquez, who discussed their plans to crack down on houses distributing drugs near school zones, the implementation of the "Ley Seca" (closing bars and clubs at 1 am), beginning large-scale investigations into major drug cartels, and sending a group of 100 police officers to foreign police academies for training to later form an elite force.

#### De-briefing

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18. (SBU) Before Simon's departure, the Ambassador spoke with her at the airport, expressing belief that US interests would be well served by release of the \$3.2 million in MAP funds for military modernization, a Section 660 waiver for Guatemala in order to more effectively work with the national police, and maintaining/boosting AID funding. The Ambassador stressed CAFTA's importance for consolidating gains in Central America. The Ambassador also mentioned his recent meeting with Jennifer Harbury and her upcoming application for humanitarian parole for 10-25 relatives of Otoniel de la Roca Mendoza (witness in the 2000 IACHR Bamaca case) whom she believes are being targeted for threats and murder (Post will draft septel recommendation for approval of their petition).  
19. (U) Simon did not have the opportunity to clear this cable before her departure.

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